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AUTHOR Wells, Robert N.
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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted to obtain more reliable data on Native Americans in higher education and to ascertain the factor contributing to their success and failure in college. A questionnaire was mailed to 79 colleges and universities serving the largest percentage of Native Americans in the United States. A total of 33 valid responses were received. Findings included the following: (1) as a group, American colleges provide relatively few data for Native Americans and to not have programs aimed at breaking down specific barriers to Native American achievement; (2) retention and matriculation rates for Native American students are low; (3) although institutional support programs and pre-college intervention programs have increased, the Native American student's financial and personal or family problems continue to be roadblocks to academic success; (4) the major barriers to higher education are economic difficulties (coupled with reduced federal aid to college students), inadequate college preparation, and difficulties in adjusting to college. Tutoring programs, developmental and remedial courses, structured counseling, and pre-college orientation are recommended. The questionnaire, with tallies of responses, is appended. (KM)

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ST. LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY
Canton, New York 13617

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## SLU PROF: NATIVE AMERICANS' NEEDS OVERLOOKED BY COLLEGES

**CANTON - Native Americans are a forgotten minority in the higher education system, the results of a national survey conducted by a St. Lawrence University professor show.**

Professor of Government Robert N. Wells, who has been involved with St. Lawrence University's programs with the St. Regis Mohawk Reservation since 1969 and who coordinated the University's conferences on American Indian Students in Higher Education held from 1970 to 1984, recently conducted a survey of 79 colleges and universities which serve the largest percentage of Native Americans in the United States. Despite the individual records of these institutions, Wells says, the survey results indicate that, as a group, American colleges provide relatively few services for Native Americans and they do not have programs aimed at breaking down specific barriers to Native American achievement.

"Retention and matriculation rates for Native American students are unacceptably low," Wells said. "Although institutional support programs and pre-college intervention programs have increased, the Native American student's financial and personal or family problems continue to be roadblocks to academic success."

The survey also showed that little attention is paid to recruitment of Native American faculty or to the development of curricular offerings in Native American studies.

St. Lawrence University began to address these problems some 20 years ago, when programs with the St. Regis Mohawk Reservation began, and has recently made a commitment to continue and strengthen the programs that the University has in place.

According to the survey results, the major barriers to higher education for Native Americans are economic difficulties (coupled with reduced federal aid to college students),



HE 022 817

Macreena A. Doyle
315/379-5585 office
315/386-8412 home

Office of University Communications

Lisa M. Cania
315/379-5585 office
315/265-3023 home

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inadequate preparation for college study, difficulties in adjustment to the college environment and personal or family problems.

Wells says that institutions can assist Native American students in continuing their education by implementing organized tutoring programs, developmental and remedial courses, structured advisement and counseling programs and pre-college orientation programs.

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(Note to reporters and editors: A copy of the survey results and a summary of the findings are attached. Dr. Wells may be reached for comment at 379-5217 or 386-3889, or contact the University Communications office, 379-5585.)

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In August 1988, we sent the attached questionnaire to seventy nine two-and four-year colleges and universities which serve the largest percentage of Native American students. We used four percent Native Americans as the cutoff for the survey as reported to the U.S. Office of Education and printed in the Chronicle of Higher Education. The purpose of this survey was to obtain more reliable data on Native Americans in higher education and to ascertain what factors contribute to their success and failure in college. The survey was addressed to academic deans with a request to the dean to forward the questionnaire to the individual or individuals most intimately associated with Native American programs and services. We received thirty-three valid responses. Two additional responses were received after the deadline for return and were not entered into the survey data.

In addition to the close-ended responses we received numerous comments and open-ended responses to the survey questions. In particular, we were encouraged by the support for the project and the eagerness of the respondents to receive the survey results. All participating institutions will receive the tallied questionnaires and we will be presenting the responses at the Western Social Sciences meetings in Albuguerque in April, as well as our presentation here today. Our intention in undertaking this survey is to build a better data base about Native American educational experiences. There is a paucity of information on college outcomes on Native Americans; matriculation and retention rates, factors which contribute to institutional holding power for Native Americans and barriers to Native American achievement. Many of the questions which were included in the survey were drawn from our own experience with Native

American students as well as the issues and topics which emerged in the fifteen conferences on the American Indian Student in Higher Education which were held at St. Lawrence University from 1970-1984.

One obvious result of the questionnaire was that most institutions, including those with large Native American populations, do not have a good data base on Native American student performance and outcomes. In particular, we were very interested in learning more about financial aid sources and support, student retention and matriculation and Native American curricular offerings. The largest response to any of these survey questions was 50 percent. Most other responses ranged from 28-32 institutions responding, indicating that in these above mentioned categories hard data is difficult to obtain. I am embarrassed to say that even our own institution had difficulty in coming up with information on matriculation and retention. Even though just over 50 percent of the schools responding (17) answered the question regarding the percentage of Native American students graduating, a matriculation rate of 27.3 percent is disturbingly low. More than half of those who leave before graduation do so in their first year (first year retention rate over five years, 46.7 percent). Just under half of the institutions responding to the survey reported financial resources from all sources (including loans) to be $469,382. or $1531 per year per student. The average tuition at the thirty-two reporting schools was $2407. With charges for room and meals averaging $2000 or more and commuting costs at $1000, most Native American students need to come up with $2000-3000 per year of out of pocket costs. The simple truth is most Native Americans and their families simply do not have the financial resources required to pay

their college bills. The keen drop in Native American college enrollment reflects those economic pressures and the squeeze created by reduced federal aid to college students. In responses to our questionnaire, financial difficulty ranks among the top four factors hindering college level achievement for Native Americans.

A positive note in the survey is the number of institutions responding to the question on support services for Native American students. All reporting institutions indicated they provided remedial or developmental courses while twenty-two or more schools said they had organized tutoring, Native American counselors, a Native American student organization and Native American content courses. Fifteen institutions indicated they had additional support services and these are listed on page 3 of Appendix A.

Richard Richardson in a provocative essay entitled "If Minority Students are to Succeed in Higher Education, Every Rung of the Educational Ladder Must be in Place" printed in the January 11, 1989 issue of The Chronicle of Higher Education enumerates the necessary rungs on the educational ladder to enable minority students to succeed. They are:

**Early intervention** in the public schools to strengthen preparation and improve students' educational planning.

**Summer "bridge" programs** to accustom minority students to college-level coursework and the campus atmosphere before they begin college.

**Tailored financial-aid programs** including policies that recognize students may not be able to contribute as much in summer earnings to their aid packages if they participate in bridge programs.

**Strong academic-assessment programs**, coupled with courses designed to offset gaps in preparation.

**Adequate tutoring services**, learning laboratories, and organized "mentoring" programs.

**Intrusive academic advising** to guide selection of courses and to intervene before small problems become major.

**Career guidance** to translate nonspecific educational goals into programs of study where coursework and desired outcomes are clearly linked.

A number of institutions (18 of 33) responded to our questionnaire that they had either early intervention programs or summer "bridge" programs to improve the transition of Native American students from high school to college. Thirty-two of the responding institutions provided remedial or developmental courses to "offset gaps in preparation." Several institutions responded both under the question of support services and the one which asked about programs which contributed to the achievement and retention of Native American students that they had developed orientation and attendance programs, counseling and special faculty advising programs, financial aid programs and career development services (see p. 3-4 of Appendix A). In reference to financial aid services and support services, we have included in the materials for this panel two papers developed for workshops on this topic by Denise White and Robert Wells. (Robert N. Wells, Jr., "Retention Issues and the Quality of Life for Native American Students in Higher Education" and Denise White, "Financial Aid Realities for Native Americans.")

The four factors most identified in the questionnaire responses as hindering college level achievement of Native Americans are: inadequate preparation, adjustment to the college environment, personal and family problems and financial difficulties. We have

addressed the question of financial aid earlier in this paper. The majority of responding schools have developed organized tutoring programs, developmental and remedial courses, structured advisement programs and pre-college orientation and academic bridge programs to respond to the Native American students' lack of adequate academic preparation and unfamiliarity with a college environment (see responses to question #12 and #9f in Appendix A). Personal and family problems continue to plague Native American students in higher education. Thirty-two schools ranked this problem as second only to inadequate preparation as a factor hindering academic achievement and success. In question #15f (other factors hindering Native American student achievement) a number of these personal and family problems emerge: lack of family support, homesickness, substance abuse, desire to remain on the reservation, maintenance of cultural identity, inadequate transportation (commuting students) and difficulty in adjusting to bureaucratic procedures at colleges.

Only a strong counseling and advisement system at the institution can uncover and deal with these personal and family circumstances confronting the Native American student. Unless there is a support system which is proactive in nature, the Native American student will often split before the academic, financial or personal problem is addressed. In question #9c, 22 of 29 institutions responding indicated they had Native American counselors. Twenty six responded that the institutions had a Native American student organization (see Appendix A questions #9c, d). Twenty-nine schools reported an average of nine Native American faculty/staff at the institution.

Along with the development of improved counseling programs, the establishment of Native American student organizations and increased numbers of Native American faculty and staff, the development of academic programs and concentrations in Native American students has had an important influence on Native American student performance. Twenty-four institutions responded that Native American content courses were in the curriculum and of the fifteen schools that identified the number of courses, the median was eleven courses (question #9e, Appendix A). Thirteen schools, 40 percent of those responding, offer a Native American Studies major.

A very positive finding in the questionnaire responses was the number of institutions which indicated they had Native American teacher training programs, (16), and the number of schools providing academic extension programs which reach reservations, rural and urban Native Americans, (22), (see Appendix A, questions 13 and 14.) A critical need in public education is Native American teachers. The most promising remedy of the Native American teacher shortage is teacher education programs at institutions with a high percentage of Native American students. One-half of the thirty-two responding schools indicated they had Native American teacher training programs.

In our survey ten institutions indicated they were commuter or primarily commuter schools. Although we did not ask how many Native American students commute, the survey reveals that one third of the Native American students attend part-time (questions 2 and 4 in Appendix A). Furthermore, twenty eight of the respondants indicated that their institution was within fifty miles of a Native American

community, either reservation, rural or urban (question 17, Appendix A).

It has been our contention since the earliest days of the Institute of the American Indian Student in Higher Education that a very important mission for higher education was to serve non-traditional Native American students where they work and live. There are over two-hundred and fifty Native American communities in the United States, many in very remote areas, and not easily accessible to postsecondary institutions. Educational opportunity for Native Americans in locations relatively close to their home environment addresses many of the problems which frustrate the Native American college student, e.g. finances, relevant curriculum, homesickness and adjustment to college life. Moreover, extension programs of institution location, on or near Native American reservations or urban centers, serve a target group which has been long neglected in higher education - adult Native Americans.

Retention and matriculation rates for Native American students continue to remain unacceptably low. Although institutional support programs and pre-college intervention programs have increased, the Native American student's opportunity to attend college and succeed in his or her academic endeavor, the financial and personal/family problems continue to be major bars to achievement. The financial aid problems can be as elemental as the inability to correctly fill out the Financial Aid Form or unawareness of financial aid sources. Unless an institution devises a financial safety net for the Native American student, he or she will invariably face frustrating delays in

receiving federal and state financial entitlements, particularly BIA aid.

The positive developments in Native American higher education are the increase in institutional support services, more early intervention programs for college bound Native Americans, expanded educational services for commuting and part-time students, the development of Native American teacher training programs and Native American academic major programs and concentrations. Fifteen years ago most of the above referenced support services and academic opportunities were virtually non existant for Native Americans. Hopefully, federal and state cutbacks and institutional retrenchment will not retard the further development of support programs for Native Americans or curtail current efforts. Of particular concern is the funding level by Congress of the twenty-four Indian controlled community colleges which enroll a high percentage of Native American students in both traditional and non-traditional programs.

**Native American Student Questionnaire**
**St. Lawrence University**
**Canton, New York 13617**

August 1, 1988

1. Name of Institution (optional) N - 33/Questionnaires cir. -79

2. Type of Institution: two year 21 four year 11 undergraduate 9

   public 20 primary residential 9

   private 9 primary commuter 9

   both 1 both 1

3. Number of Native American students enrolled 305 N-32

4. Percentage of Native American students enrolled full time 637
   N -28

5. Tuition (academic year, full time) $ 2407

6. Financial aid sources for Native American students in the most recent academic year: N-13
   a) Institutional scholarships, fellowships, and grants $119,591
   b) Loans and work study $1 to 1946.15 N-13
   c) Federal/state government, BIA aid $ 208,845.07 N-13

7. Matriculation rate of Native American students over the past five years (The percentage of Native American students who graduated from those who enrolled) 27.37 N-17 SD-22.7

8. Retention rate of first year Native American students over the past five years (if available) 46.7 N-12 SD-22.7

9. Does your institution provide any of the following support services and activities for Native American students?:
   a) organized tutoring yes 23 no 3 N-31
   b) remediation (developmental courses in either math, reading, or english composition) yes 33 no 0 N-33
   c) Native American couselors yes 22 no 8 N-32
   d) Native American student organization or club yes 26 no 6 N-32
   e) Native American content courses in the curriculum yes 24 no 8 N-32
      How many? 12 N-15
   f) other support services (please specify)

      yes - 15 no-18 N-33

      for summary see attached

10. Number of Native Americans who are faculty or professional staff 9 N-31

11. Does you institution offer an academic major or concentration in Native American Studies? yes 13 no 20 N-33

12. Does your institution sponser academic or enrichment programs for pre-college Native American students? e.g. Upward Bound, Talent Search, Summer workshops, etc.
yes 18 no 15 N-33

13. Does your institution sponser teacher training programs for Native Americans? yes 16 no 16 N-32

14. Does your institution sponser extension programs which reach, on reservation, rural, or urban Native Americans?
yes 22 no 11 N-33

15. Listed below are some factors which have been cited as hindering college level achievement for Native Americans. Please rank each item from 1-10, with ten representing the greatest difficulty for Native Americans enrolled at your institution.

a) inadequate preparation 7.3 N-33
b) adjustment to college environment 6.8 N-32
c) financial difficulty 6.1 N-30
d) racial or cultural discrimination 3.89 N-29
e) personal or family problems 6.9 N-33
f) other; please specify
see attached

16. Please list below any programs at your institution which you believe have contributed to Native American students academic achievement and retention.

see attached

17. Is there a Native American community, on or off reservation, or urban, within 50 miles of your institution?
50 miles yes 28 no 4 N-32
100 miles yes 13 no 8 N-21

Comments:

## APPENDIX A

### Native American Student Questionnaire

9. f) Services to Indian People Program (STIPP)
Attendance program
American Native program (counselng, introduction N.A. issues to campus)
Counseling
Tutoring
Learning resource center and library
Placement testing
Vocational career counseling
Day care
Student newsletters
Developmental studies
Academic and financial aid
Upward Bound
Pre-Freshman summer program.

15. f) lack of family support
transportation
homesickness
maintaining cultural identity
attractiveness of village life
transportation
adjustment to bureaucratic offices
desire to remain on reserve
substance abuse
alcohol abuse
child care
cultural display of indifference which hinders campus involvement
acculturation and how this affects achievement and education in general

16. Committee on Special Educational Projects
Language programs
Remedial programs (writing, reading, mathematics)
Orientation and attendance programs
Tutorial programs
Developmental courses
Counseling and faculty advisors and staff
American Indian programs
Financial aid programs
Student centers and clubs
Native American Awareness Week
Upward Bound
Cross Cultural Communications Department
Honors Institute
Rural Student Services